

FINAL EVALUATION

**M3 - ENHANCING THE CONSERVATION OF COASTAL WETLANDS
2016-2022**

01.11.2022

1. INTRODUCTION

Coastal wetlands are amongst the richest and most productive ecosystems in the Mediterranean Basin. Yet half of all natural wetlands in the region have been lost since 1970, and most of those that remain, in particular coastal wetlands, are suffering from unsustainable water abstraction, mainly from agriculture, tourism and urban development. However, effective coastal wetland conservation and restoration offer nature-based solutions to societal challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss.

As a network of 37 partners, we work to protect, manage, and restore Mediterranean coastal wetlands. We do this by conserving biodiversity and ecosystem functionality, improving management and promoting sustainable use, and strengthening the resilience of coastal communities and economies. Our activities include research, on-the-ground action, training, awareness-raising, and advocacy. Over the last seven years, we have worked together to pursue the following objectives.

OBJECTIVES

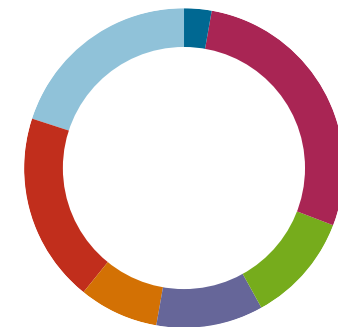
- Build a Mediterranean partnership for coastal wetland conservation and restoration.
- Develop and share a range of knowledge and tools for coastal wetland protection and management, supporting science-based decision-making.
- Improve coastal wetland protection and restoration policy at all levels through impactful communications and advocacy.
- Carry out and scale-up coastal wetland restoration that benefits nature and people by involving key stakeholders in different geographical, institutional and socio-economic contexts.
- Reinforce capacity for effective wetland governance and management.
- Identify and adopt sustainable practices and business models to reduce impacts on wetlands by working with economic sectors.
- Raise awareness about the importance and value of coastal wetlands for people and biodiversity.

BUDGET ENGAGED

€ 13,000,000

BUDGET PER STRATEGY

- Mediterranean Wetlands Partnership 3%
- Knowledge Generation and Scaling Up 28%
- Sectoral Sustainability 11%
- Communications 11%
- Policy and Advocacy 8%
- Governance and Management of wetlands 19%
- Wetland Restoration 20%



FIELD SITES



THE PARTNERSHIP



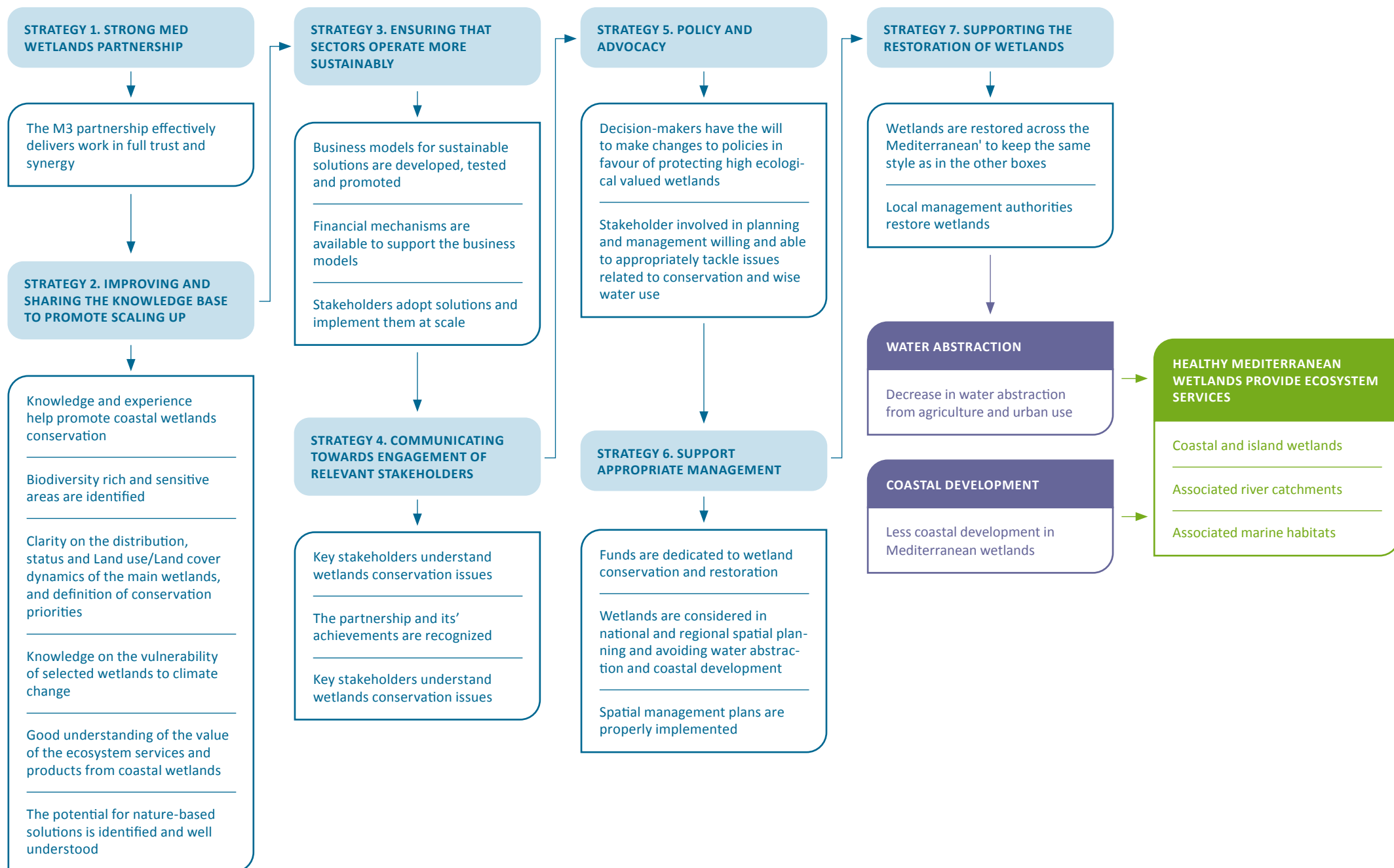
EURONATUR



MedWet



And their associated partners: AAACOA, ANAO (Algeria), Association Amis des Oiseaux (AAO), Association Hyla, Centre for Protection and Research of Birds of Montenegro (CZIP), DiversEarth, Doga Dernegi, Association Exploralis (Tunisia), Global Water Partnership for the Mediterranean (GWP Med), Institut National Agronomique de Tunisie (INAT), Institute for Nature Conservation in Albania (INCA), King's College of London, Martin Schneider-Jacoby Association (MSJA), MedINA, MedPAN, MPA Sinis Mal di Ventre, Nature Trust Malta, ORC (Turkey), Pimenko, Plan Bleu, Salarte, Sociedade Portuguesa para o Estudo das Aves (SPEA), Terra Cypria, University of Cagliari- Centro Conservazione Biodiversità, University of Catania



2. PROGRESS AND ACTIVITIES

We based our work on a jointly developed Theory of Change comprising seven strategies, implemented via eight thematic projects.

We embarked in knowledge generation, communications, and policy advocacy at the pan-Mediterranean level. Improved governance, wetland restoration, and application of innovative wetland diagnostic and monitoring tools were undertaken in four pilot sites (Buna Delta, Ghar el Melh, Oristano, Ulcinj salina). Wetland restoration was also implemented in nine Mediterranean islands (via MedIsWet project) and at three additional sites including salt pans and in several salt pans including Bahia de Cadiz. To deliver on our joint objectives, we took a multistakeholder and multidisciplinary approach in which site-based projects were complemented by and benefited from overarching thematic projects, and vice versa.

Overall, we implemented a broad set of activities ranging from on-the-ground monitoring and desk-based research to habitat restoration and policy advocacy. We also regularly exchanged knowledge and experience between projects and partners and captured progress and project effectiveness through a common monitoring and evaluation framework.

STRATEGY 1: MEDITERRANEAN WETLANDS PARTNERSHIP

The partnership was set up to develop, share, communicate, and promote best practice on the protection, management, and restoration of Mediterranean wetlands. Joining forces meant that we could consolidate and strengthen our collective role and be recognised as key players in wetland conservation. Our activities included:

- agreeing on a partnership model with a shared vision, and ensuring an adequate coordination and implementation of the programme;
- creating a governance model that ensures a long-term partnership;
- developing a communications strategy to produce shared messages for policymakers and other key stakeholders;
- defining a collective fundraising strategy to access long-term funding.

STRATEGY 2: KNOWLEDGE GENERATION AND SCALING UP

We sought to generate and share science-based knowledge on wetland dynamics, ecosystem services and Nature-based solutions. Our activities included:

- setting-up criteria to prioritize Mediterranean wetlands for restoration;
- integrating climate resilience, nature-based solutions, and ecosystem services into wetlands governance and management;
- producing tools to increase decision-maker understanding of wetlands, and strengthen the capacity of local site managers, NGOs, and other stakeholders through webinars, training courses, and tools such as maps and infographics, handbooks, regional and local assessments.
- setting up a Wetland Index to assess and monitor the conservation status of wetlands.

STRATEGY 3: SECTORAL SUSTAINABILITY

Our goal was to ensure that the economic sectors with significant impact on biodiversity and water resources in Mediterranean wetlands such as tourism, salt production, agriculture, and fisheries, operate more sustainably. Our activities included:

- identifying key companies, sustainable practices and business models to reduce impacts on wetlands;
- convening business partners to adopt sustainable practices to reduce water use and their ecological footprint;
- sharing experience with the private sector in pilot sites to create sustainable business models;
- identifying financial actors, levers, and mechanisms to transform economic models for lasting sustainability.

STRATEGY 4: COMMUNICATIONS

We sought to engage relevant stakeholders, increasing their understanding about the need to conserve and restore coastal wetlands that act as Nature-based solutions to the water, climate, and biodiversity crises we face. Our activities included:

- developing a dedicated website* and delivering innovative social media messaging and ensuring regular coverage in national and local press;
- strengthening media sector capacity for scientific journalism;
- putting human stories and the people-wetlands interaction at the centre of our communications;
- using interactive tools such as 'flooded future' maps to disseminate knowledge.



*A free access online resource and information platform to raise awareness on wetlands status and importance, spread good practices and assist decision-makers and managers in protecting and restoring vital wetland ecosystems.

STRATEGY 5: POLICY AND ADVOCACY

We worked to influence the Ramsar and Barcelona Conventions, international institutions such as the European Union, and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), as well as national institutions, to integrate wetland restoration and Nature-based solutions in environmental policies. Our activities included:

- establishing dialogues with the European Commission to include the restoration of wetlands in the draft Nature Restoration Law and in the EU Adaptation Strategy on Climate Change;
- positioning coastal wetlands as a priority for the UfM Greener Med Agenda;
- advocating for restoration of wetlands as a Nature-based solution in the Ramsar and Barcelona Conventions;
- advocating at different institutional levels for the establishment of wetland inventories, the strengthening of sustainability strategies and management schemes, and the promotion of restoration.

STRATEGY 6: GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF WETLANDS

We sought to facilitate good governance and inclusive management of coastal wetlands. We also supported improved spatial planning regulations and the identification of effective funding channels. At site level, we engaged in the drafting and revision of management plans, ensuring the inclusion of measures for wetlands of high ecological value. Our activities included:

- supporting the improvement of governance systems to ensure inclusive development processes for management plans and incentives for local economies;
- influencing spatial planning regulations to consider wetland protection and management;
- facilitating the implementation of spatial management plans;
- advocating for the designation of protected areas in Ulcinj and Oristano.

STRATEGY 7: WETLAND RESTORATION

To bend the curve on wetland biodiversity loss, recover and maintain wetland functionality, and promote socio-economic opportunities, we worked to accelerate Mediterranean wetland restoration for nature and people within European Union's and United Nations' policy processes. Our activities included:

- identifying and prioritizing Mediterranean wetlands for restoration using technical and citizen science approaches;
- Developing tools for supporting state of the art restoration such as good practice fact-sheets and a decision making handbook;
- building the technical capacity of restoration practitioners and managers through online training and experience exchange;
- implementing local restoration projects at a variety of pilot sites across the Mediterranean and promoting replication in the field at additional sites.

KEY LESSONS

1. Our jointly developed Theory of Change helped us build our pan-Mediterranean partnership around a shared vision and mission and ensured we worked towards joint goals.
2. Testing and applying simple, cost-efficient, and replicable tools in different countries and contexts supports effective communications, advocacy, and management.
3. At site level, targeting key stakeholders worked better than trying to communicate with everyone.
4. Mainstreaming wetlands in international policies at different institutional levels is crucial for securing legal protection for and ongoing investment in wetland management and conservation.
5. Restoration takes time and requires long-term financing, and project expectations and timelines must be realistic.
6. Even if cost-benefit analyses highlight the potential of nature-based solutions, their acceptance by key stakeholders requires effective engagement and communication.
7. Comprehensive tools such as River or Wetland Contracts can support the design and adoption of Nature-based solutions at landscape or jurisdictional levels.
8. Working with the private sector requires a flexible approach that takes account of their needs and expectations, and also provides them with cost-effective solutions and guidance.
9. The impact of our tools is difficult to assess in an era when everything is decentralized, online, and run by networks of different actors.
10. The regional scale and ambition of our project helped attract interest from decision-makers all over the Mediterranean basin, and then turn that interest into action.

3. ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACTS

Our collective effort was effective in creating a community of people working together to conserve and restore Mediterranean wetlands through developing and promoting innovative tools, engaging in advocacy, and raising awareness about the importance of wetlands.

We developed several tools and approaches to facilitate, measure, and communicate the effectiveness of conservation efforts, including the [Wetland Index for conservation status](#), the self-assessment and planning tool for wetland governance, and the mapping of potential areas for wetland restoration. For the first time, status and trends in over 100 sites have been evaluated using these indices, providing a key baseline for future conservation work. In addition, an inventory of over 15,000 island wetlands has provided important information about their location, delineation, conservation status and threats in an open access database.

Our communication campaigns had significant reach and the benefits of wetlands for people are now better understood. The [Wetland Based Solutions](#) website, for example, had more than 60,000 visits in its first year.

At site level, the most significant outcomes include new protected areas in Ulcinj and Oristano, and the commitment and involvement of local authorities in wetland conservation in the Balearic Islands, Cyprus, Ulcinj salina, Oristano, Buna and Ghar el Melh.

We also secured more than €5 million in additional funding for restoring in five wetlands starting in 2021 and continuing beyond 2022: Ulcinj salina, Bahia de Alcudia (Mallorca), Ghar el Melh, Oristano, and Laguna di Nora.

Local stakeholders are now equipped and ready to ensure ongoing effective management in Bahia de Cadiz, Buna, Ghar el Melh, Oristano, Laguna di Nora and Ulcinj salina.

And the consolidation of the Mediterranean Alliance for Wetlands as a platform for collaboration, exchange, and advocacy by members and partners will secure MAVA's legacy and ensure our work continues.

CASE STUDY 1: ISLAND WETLANDS: 15,000 REASONS FOR ACTION

Since 2017, a coalition of conservation organisations, 'MedIsWet', has sought to raise awareness of the importance of Mediterranean island wetlands, and drive regional efforts to save them. On islands, where water and other resources are limited, and the impacts of tourism and development are particularly severe, we need healthy wetlands and the services they provide more than ever.

The first phase of MedIsWet was to find out the scale of the task, and a complete inventory of all island wetlands in the Mediterranean revealed a total of more than 15,000 sites. Now, MedIsWet is involved in a range of wetland restoration projects in critical sites on islands across the Mediterranean. Working on all kinds of island wetlands from Greece to the Balearic Islands, MedIsWet is convening stakeholders, building expert networks, sharing best practices, and raising public awareness about why wetlands matter and what we need to do to save them.



Local communities engaged in the creation of artificial islets for bird nesting in the Saline di Priolo (Sicily), as part of restoration activities undertaken in more than 25 sites around the Mediterranean.

CASE STUDY 2: THE MARISTANIS PROJECT: FROM SIX RAMSAR SITES TO A NEW REGIONAL PARK

The Maristanis project involved six Ramsar sites in the Gulf of Oristano, an important Mediterranean biodiversity hotspot.

Here, wetlands always played a crucial role in history, culture, and traditional economies. However, unsustainable economic activities, coastal development, and climate change have severely affected wetlands. This meant a strategic and participatory approach to wetland governance was urgently required to strengthen public sector capacity, financial resources, and planning and project effectiveness in wetland sites.

To meet this need, eleven municipalities and three other authorities decided to undertake an integrated and shared approach to governance through the Maristanis Coastal Wetland Contract. This consists of a voluntary agreement on the shared management of wetland ecosystems through which private and public sector actors jointly promote and safeguard wetlands through nature-based solutions that deliver pollution reduction, habitat restoration, and climate adaptation. It also forms the basis for the new Parco Regionale delle Terre d'Acqua dell'Oristanese.



During the World Wetlands Day 2021, 11 municipalities and 3 authorities celebrated the signature of the Maristanis Coastal Wetland Contract (MCWC) in a ceremony in the historic buildings of Oristano University.

KEY IMPACTS

The impacts of the programme are visible at regional and local levels. Activities on the ground had direct ecological and social impacts, creating improved functionality in wetlands and better conditions for people. Regionally, we contributed to improved policies for wetlands, meaning that their protection and restoration will be a priority now and in the future. Specific impacts include:

1. Ulcinj Salina declared as a Nature Park and the six Ramsar sites of Oristano Gulf protected under a Wetland Contract.
2. Eight wetlands (Bahia de Cadiz, Buna, Doñana, Estany des Ponts, Ghar el Melh, Maristanis, Oristano and Ulcinj salina) have been evaluated using the Wetland Index, and half show an improvement in their conservation status since our work started.
3. 25 wetlands (30,000 ha) across the Mediterranean have benefited from restoration action.
4. Nearly 10,000 ha of coastal wetlands have achieved better protection.
5. Ghar el Melh was recognized as the first Ramsar City in the world.
6. In pilot sites, over 500 business stakeholders have adopted concrete sustainable practices and technologies in the farming, salt production, and tourism sectors.
7. In over 50 critical wetlands, managers' ability to deal with topics such as wetland governance, participatory processes, and monitoring and restoration, has been improved.
8. Provisions for the restoration of wetlands are embedded in legal frameworks, including the UfM policy framework for a Greener Mediterranean, the Biodiversity Action Plan of the Barcelona Convention, and the EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change.
9. A Ramsar Resolution on wetlands restoration as a Nature-based solution was submitted by the partnership and approved at COP 14. The COP chose to give it a global scope of application beyond the Mediterranean and to create a Community of Practice, and MedWet will be involved in overseeing its implementation.

4. WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT

Owing to the challenges that the region is facing, we have decided to keep working in partnership to protect and restore Mediterranean wetlands and continue delivering on MAVA's mission and vision. We will work to increase the resilience of wetlands and communities to climate change, promote and implement nature-based solutions, improve water security for people and nature, bend the curve of biodiversity loss, and improve landscape connectivity and ecosystem health.

Most partners have joined the [Mediterranean Alliance for Wetlands](#) (MAW), a network of NGOs and research institutions that supports Mediterranean society to protect, restore and sustainably use wetlands and rivers. It does this through policy advocacy, communications, capacity development, and on-the-ground conservation and restoration that deliver biodiversity recovery and resilient wetlands. We have secured funds for the coordination of MAW and implementation of key activities for the next three years.

Alliance partners are developing an ambitious [Wetlands for Mediterranean Resilience Initiative](#) to promote integrated river basin and coastal zone management and accelerate the restoration and sustainable use of these key ecosystems. Building on the experience, knowledge and learnings of partners, we will support the transfer, replication and scaling of tools and best practices for managers, decision-makers, the private sector and civil society.

Through MAW, we will also work closely with other key regional partners. For example, the collaboration with MedWet will continue on advocacy and communication, and its Managers Network will remain a privileged partner.

“The Mediterranean Alliance for Wetlands will play a key role as the voice of civil society and research institutes to guarantee healthy Mediterranean wetlands that supports thriving communities”

Tobias Salathé, The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

“Thanks to the Red Alert campaign and the letters from the Alliance sent to the prime minister of Greece, journalists could raise awareness at the international level about our situation and the urgency to protect the Erimitis wetlands in Corfu in Greece.”

Xenia Tombrou, leader of the Save Erimitis Campaign

